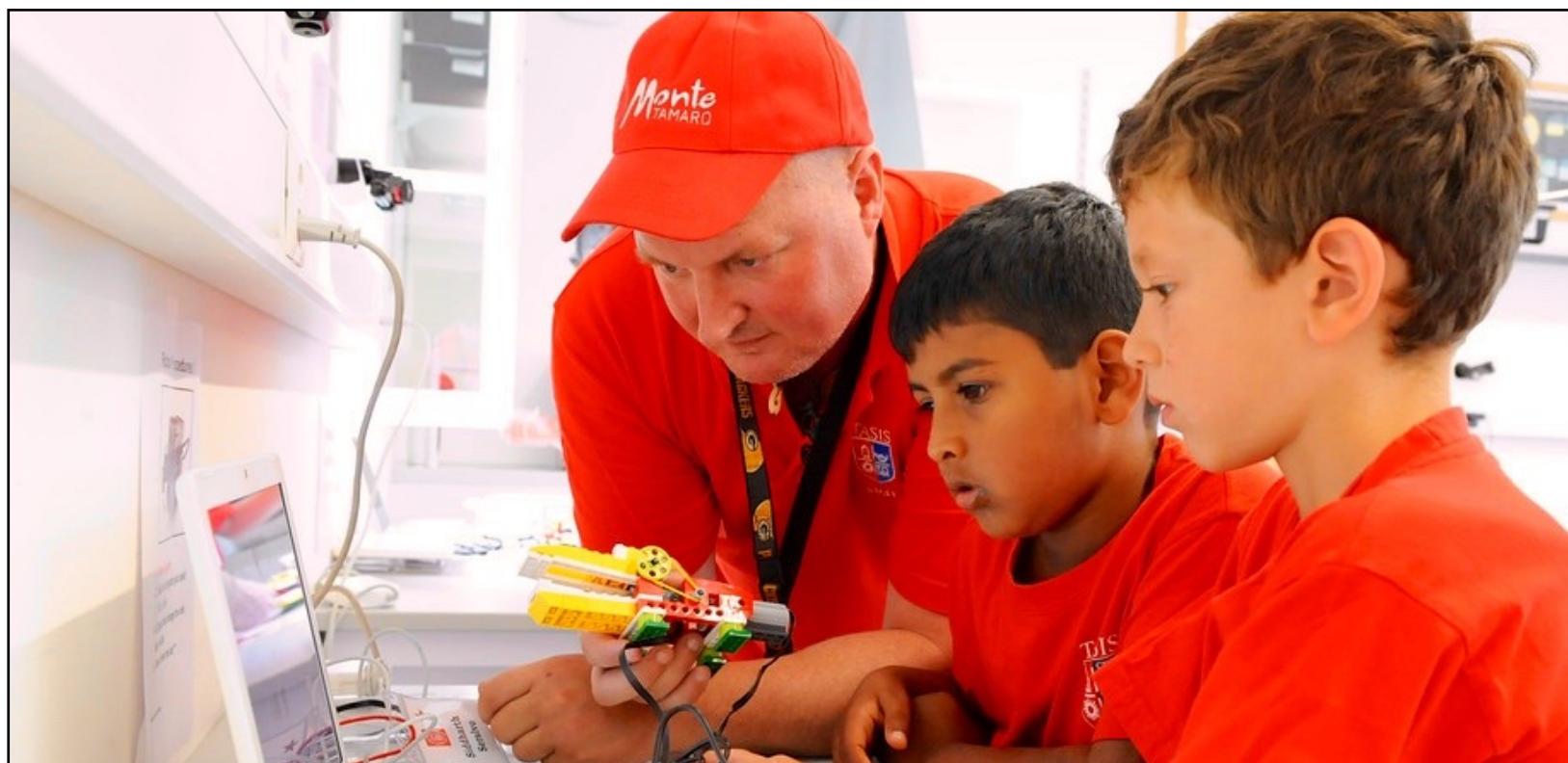


# StSometimes

V164 July 2015



**Lego Robotics at TASIS  
Dog/Cat/House Sitting  
DoughBoy Biking Team**



# LEGO

## Summer Camp

The initial summer teaching ES and MS in Switzerland

In mid-July, the first session of Lego Robotics finished as a success. The elementary (CDE) classes were filled six days a week for a month. The middle school (MSP) sections were lean on student participation due to competing time slots with rock climbing, soccer camp, and water-skiing. (How can I compete with sports like that - in beautiful Switzerland?)

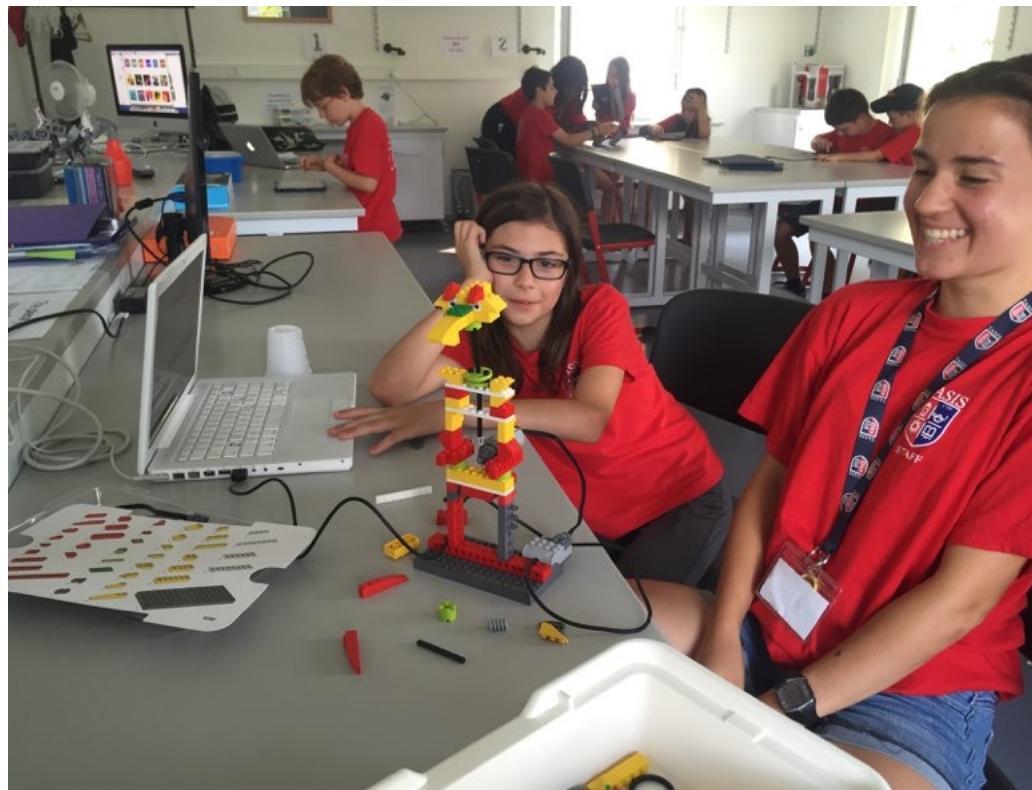
Can you believe I am getting paid to do this? Pinch me. Please.

Six days a week, for two hours, I have fourteen students from ages six

to ten. Each day is a different set of students. Saturdays are a bit different with two class times of students that have chosen to have extra Lego time rather than other Saturday activities.

I introduced the [WeDo](#) kits, with only two students per kit per computer. It worked out fine, except the nine and ten year olds are ready ready to move on to [Mindstorms](#) after one or two hours of WeDo. However, imagine elementary students being on task for two straight hours! It's true. I'd never believe it. Yes, I was one of those kids and four hours was usual.

but for a classroom? That's not to say all of them are always on task. I was sure to stock up my class with extension activities for students that simply "burn out" on lego projects. The techie from the school year, Tim Venchus, and I made a deal and I acquired a set of iPads for the summer program to load up coding apps like [Lightbot](#), [Kodable](#), and [Tynker](#). Then I added the Kano kit, a present from a room parent last year, with a 19in monitor. Just in case all of that wasn't enough, I included a MOSS robot kit that was donated to school by another parent last year. There was always a lot to do!



"Do we **have** to take a break Greg? I **already** went to the bathroom. Can't we just keep on doing our project?"

-elementary student



The middle school program (MSP) was a Monday and Thursday class from 1:30 to 5:00. Most of the time, the students were burned out after 2 plus hours so I would take them down to buy gelato or swim. The class was only three Hondurans, one American, and a boy from Dominican Republic. Spanish was rampant so I played a mix of 80's music and merengue during class. We ended up talking a lot about Honduran culture as they built and programmed their Mindstorms. The three Honduran girls were from Tegucigalpa and brought back a lot of memories of 2001-2004 for me.

The MSP is run differently than the elementary. They go on trips all over Europe on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Hence the classes on Monday and Thursdays. Fridays are then a sign up first come, first served system. My Fridays were full of Russians that wanted to check out Robotics. It would have been

more successful if the Monday and Thursday classes had been full, but the smaller class allowed me to do more with the elementary students.

The biggest challenge with robotics and so many classes is certainly the kits. If I allow the elementary students to try and build the Mindstorms, as more of a challenge for students that have done well with the WeDo kits, then the MSP and the elementary students have to break down their robots at the end of class. This resulted in rivers of tears from the elementary kids. Imagine spending two hours and getting close to finishing a robot, but as the two hour limit is up, you have to break it down before even programming it to move. Yuck. The only answer is more kits. At \$400 per kit, and small MSP classes competing with rock climbing or waterskiing, it will be über difficult to budget for more legos next year.



**WeDo Lego kits are a great introduction to robots for elementary students!**



# Feeling Like an Extra Lego

You know I can fit into any group in any situation. I'm adaptable and outgoing. Sure. But this has been a balancing act. If I offer to be involved in too much, the work load increases 100 fold and the money stays the same. This school environment tends to take a mile if you offer an inch. I chose to seek balance.

Few, if any, of the adults cross over and work in two different camps. The TSP (Tasis Summer Program - High School), MSP (Middle School Program) and CDE (Chateau de Enfantes) are all run separately. They take trips on separate days, eat at different times, have different assemblies, and are run each by their own staff. I didn't know this coming in and I don't really care. I'm a teacher that has class times rather than being a counselor and staying with the kids 24/7.

All of this causes a problem socially. Who are these people? When I am in the classroom, I have one assistant that is a counselor. Sebastian is great. He helps out with my CDE classes and I can even go to the bathroom when I need to. I also have more individual contact with students. But the

point of socializing? Not much. I can't name even half of the one hundred summer staff.

Not only am I living off campus in my own apartment, but I also spent the entire first session taking care of Coco the dog at Caza Volpi (my friend Giorgio Volpi went to the USA for a month and I was house/dog/cat sitting. That meant traveling down through the city and up another mountain side. That's a lot different than what the staff at summer camp was doing. They live in the dorms with the kids and go out to the bars around 11pm while I'm on the other mountain letting the dog out.

This is one crazy summer of alone time that I did not plan on. Writing, teaching, reading, road biking, and computer time take up most of my free time. Don't get me wrong. I need a little "Greg time" but this has been ridiculous.

The final duties I have were a result of offering to help out. Yeah, stupid me. But I really wanted to do something more. So each session I take a school van to the Lugano airport, five minutes away, to arrivals or departures. All day.

**Different in every way. I don't fit into the summer staff. Not sure how to change it without exponentially adding to my workload without adding to my pay!**



## Raptor vs Elephant?

Mindstorms all the way. Imagine, a middle school student spending five hours on an elephant robot! I certainly can. I watched him work on it, try it out, fix it, and fix it over and over again. Tech is the specialty for me. Next stop...First Lego League...somewhere.

# A New Love

## Road Biking



That's where I go. That's my bike above. So long, dive kit. So long, boat! This is the new Greg. Finally. Time to focus on biking around Switzerland! I've had the bike since November, but you cannot just go out and start biking mountain roads with clip-in pedals uphill and relatively unknown brakes downhill. Little by little.

So I started by buying a bike carrier for the Mercedes. This way, I can drive down the mountain, park, and bike on level ground around Lake Lugano. It works. My habit now is to bike in the morning coolness.

I am almost all kitted out. Dad bought me a Pillsbury Doughboy biking jersey. Hint hint. Yeah, the fat boy is out exercising now! Any who, I have all the equipment. Todd - he and wifey Sarah are co-owners of the Mercedes - and I have an air pump that plugs into the lighter of the car. Shorts, jerseys, water bottles, helmet, shoes, clips, light, rear light, and a bunch of other gear is all kept in a shopping bag in the trunk. Out comes the gear in the early morning and out I go for a few KM ride. The most I have done according to my new Map My Ride app is 16km (10miles). That doesn't seem like much, but hey, I have just started! Look out , here comes the dough boy! The more I ride the more I love it. Todd is going to be chugging and puffing to keep up with me. Soon I will start on mountain routes so I can start from home and leave the car in the garage.



# Little Miss Mercedes

I never thought I'd own a Mercedes and Live in Switzerland!



Have I mentioned that I love my Mercedes? I truly do. It's in perfect condition, even though Sarah ran into two motorcycles with it. Back in June, we had to get it repaired. Our mechanic, Roberto, is the same mechanic that worked on the car when the little old lady owned it. The problem is, none of us owners speak Italian and Roberto doesn't speak English. However, the solution is German. Roberto had a mother from Germany so he speaks German. I can understand him fine and he understands me. Cool.

For the first session, I was taking care of Volpi's house. The way parking works here is there are few public spaces. Most spaces are paid passes for months or a year. The other spots are two hour max. Volpi left both of his cars in the garages and his space is shared with a neighbor's garage so I couldn't park in the driveway. It would block in the neighbor. So, I had to park a few minutes walk away in the public parking. That was usually a problem because of the popular restaurant next door. Usually I could find a spot. Yet, there was no cover for the car so I had to wash the Mercedes every other day to get the tree sap off the paint. The worst part of it all...I have a garage on the two bedroom apartment I

wasn't using. I got pretty good at knowing the busy times for each of the car washes in the area. Few are automatic. Those are always busy. It's cheaper and easier to use the self washes close by.

At the end of July, Volpi returned and the rains started. June was dry but July ended with intermittent rain storms. Fantastic! I could park the Mercedes in the garage of the apartment and not worry about washing as often. And then came the damn cat.

There is a black cat that lives in the apartment complex. It always gets locked out and I let it into the building when it whines. Now the cat and I are enemies. The little demon walks all over my car and leaves cat prints!

Looking back at the few paragraphs, it sounds like I am really struggling. Funny isn't it. These are such first world problems. None of it bothers me. I am thriving here. There really isn't one single thing that isn't fantastic. This experience is like living in Disney World. I keep reminding myself life is not really like this around the world, just in Lugano.

Will I leave next year? That's still my plan. Career first!



*Irène Landolt*  
**R.I.P.**

*I will miss you!*

**27.02.1963 - 14.07.2015**